Short Service Commission to Naval sailors

†3599. SHRI DHARAM PAL SABHARWAL: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are contemplating to grant Short Service Commission to the sailors in Navy who are professional license holders;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the number of officers likely to be granted this Commission?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) to (c) As per the existing Rules, sailors in the Navy including professional license holders are eligible to apply for Short Service Commission if they fulfill the prescribed age and educational criteria. There are no earmarked vacancies. Those sailors who qualify in Services Selection Board on the basis of their merit, are granted Short Service Commission.

Expansion of Nathula Pass Roads

†3600. SHRI PYARELAL KHANDELWAL: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether in view of the proposed Indo-Chinese trade *via* Nathula Pass any scheme for the expansion of roads at the Nathula Pass and its adjoining areas, is under consideration;

(b) whether any action plan has been sent to the Government by the Sikkim Government in this regard; and

(c) if so, the details thereof alongwith the action being taken by the Central Government thereon?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) The Joint Statement signed by the two Prime Ministers during the visit of the Chinese Premier to India in April 2005 noted that both sides reviewed with satisfaction the implementation of the memorandum on the border trade through the Nathula Pass. Double laning of the Gangtok-Nathula road in Sikkim is included under Special Accelerated Development Programme of Ministry of Shipping Road Transport & Highways.

(b) and (c) Government of Sikkim have requested Government of India

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

for starting luxury bus service between Gangtok and Lhasa in the context of the opening of the Nathula border. However as per memorandum signed between Government of China and India, it has been agreed to open the Nathula Pass only for the limited purpose of border trade and not for other purposes such as tourist movement and bus service.

Ex-Servicemen in India

†3601. SHRI ISAM SINGH: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of ex-servicemen in India; and

(b) the details of the income earned by the ex-servicemen through the canteen facility provided to them in India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI B.K. HANDIQUE): (a) the number of ex-servicemen registered as on 31st December, 2004 is 19,06,693.

(b) As one of the welfare schemes, the ex-servicemen are given stores/ grocery items at rates which are comparatively cheaper in comparison to market rates through the Canteen Stores Department. Hence the question of earning any income by ex-servicemen does not arise.

Purchase of Mirage 2000 B Air Crafts

3602. SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian Air Force is planning to purchase Mirage 2000 B Aircrafts when compared to its original proposal to purchase F-16 for India; and

(b) if so, what are the main reasons for Indian Air Force to go in for purchase of Mirage Aircrafts?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) Government constantly review the security environment and accordingly decide to induct appropriate equipment and to make other arrangements for adequate defence preparedness. It would not be in the interest of national security to give details.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.